

TWO LETTERS

William FROM *Thickland*

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

MR. BURKE, &c.

THE JOURNAL

1853

6. 2. 1853

1853

TWO LETTERS

FROM

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

M R. B U R K E,

On the French Revolution :

ONE TO THE TRANSLATOR

OF HIS

Reflections on the Revolution in France;

THE OTHER TO CAPTAIN W——,

On the same Subject.

L O N D O N :

Printed for H. D. SYMONDS, in Paternoster-Row :
fold also by the Booksellers in Bond-street and Piccadilly.

1791.

X61-2300

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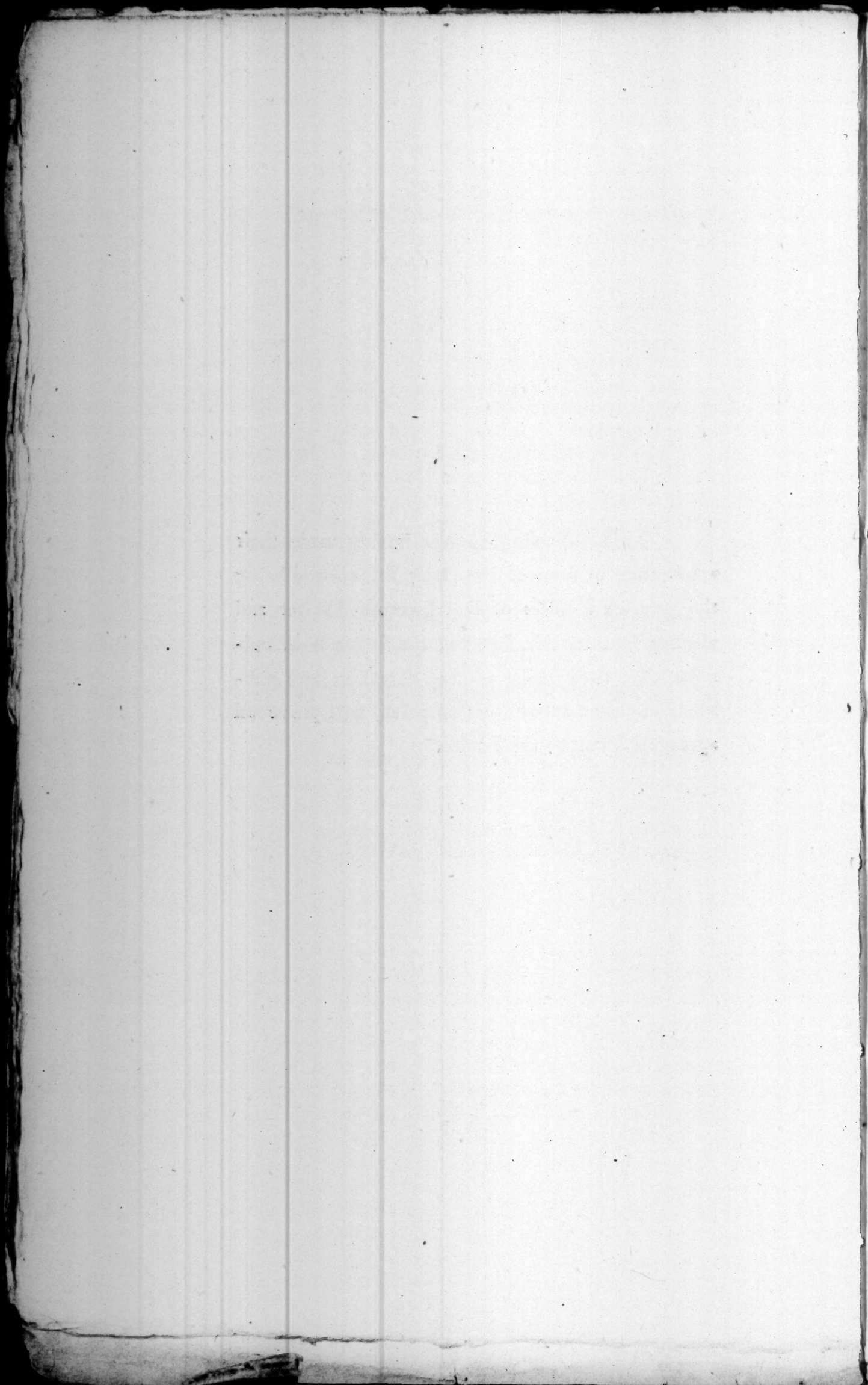
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THE following Letters having made their appearance in some of the Daily Prints, and being the genuine Epistles of that favourite Writer and pleasing Orator, Mr. BURKE, the Editor is of opinion, that their being printed together, and published in the manner of a Pamphlet, will prove an agreeable Treat to the Public.



L E T T E R

F R O M

The Rt. Hon. EDMUND BURKE

T O

The TRANSLATOR of his *Reflections on the Revolution in France.*

S I R,

YESTERDAY I had the honour of receiving your Letter, in which you desire that I may revise and soften the expressions which I have made use of concerning Henry IV. King of France*. I am
not

* The passage objected to by Mr. Burke's Translator is the following: — "Henry of Navarre was a politic and active prince. He possessed indeed great humanity and mildness; but an humanity and mildness that never stood in the way of his interests. He never sought to be loved, without putting himself in a condition first to be feared. He used soft language with determined conduct. He asserted and maintained his humanity in the gross, and distributed

not at all surprised at your request; for since your childhood, you have heard every one talk of the pleasing manner and mild temper of that Prince. Those qualities have faded, and almost obliterated, that vigilance and vigour, without which he would never have either merited or enjoyed the title of Great. The intention of this is self-evident. The name of Henry IV. recalls the idea of his popularity; the sovereigns of France are proud to have descended from this hero, and are taught to look up to him as a model. It is under the shelter of his venerable name that all the conspirators against the laws, against religion, and against good order, have dared to persuade their king, that he ought to abandon all the precautions of power to the designs of ambition. After having thus disarmed, they have resolved to deliver their sovereign, his nobility, and his magistrates (the natural

tributed his aids of concession only in the detail. He spent the income of his prerogatives nobly, but he took care not to break in upon the capital; *never abandoning for a moment any of the claims which he made under the fundamental laws, nor sparing to shed the blood of those who opposed him, often in the field, sometimes upon the scaffold.*" Page 201.

supporters

supporters of his throne) into the hands of thieves and of assassins.

It was a long time since this plot was first formed. It was resolved to put it into execution according to circumstances; and the mode adopted, of everywhere suspending the portraits of Henry IV. was one of the means employed for the success of the design:—a means truly perfidious, as it holds snares to the unwary, and catches mankind by the bait of their own virtues.

Every time that this politic prince had occasion to deliver one of his insinuating harangues (which was very often) he took particular care not to be too literal in his expressions. It was, I suppose to a kind of Assembly of Notables that he spoke of his design to free himself entirely from their restraint. But when he employed these courtly threats, of which, by the bye, he was very liberal, he advanced his right foot, and, as he himself says, “always clapt his hand upon the hilt of his sword.

Those

Those men whose power is envied, and against whom violent factions are formed, cannot with safety be good in any other manner. Trajan, Marcus Aurelius, and all others in similar situations, who have dared to be virtuous, could never have enjoyed this arduous and critical pre-eminence but by inviolably pursuing all means in their power of attracting respect, and of sustaining their authority. Without this, they could not have exercised their benevolence.

In such a situation, a prince may with safety, and with as much sagacity as glory, divide his authority with his people; because then he has the power to divide it at his discretion, and is not forced to abandon it.

Whatever may be the honour annexed to such a voluntary division, whatever may be the political motive that can induce a sovereign to make such a sacrifice in certain cases, Henry IV. neither did the one nor the other: he never, in any manner whatever,
parted

parted with an atom of his authority. Did ever he leave it to the judgment of the citizens of Paris to determine the right which the laws of the kingdom gave him of being their king and their sovereign? Did they ever enter into any treaty with him concerning his title to the throne? Where is there in the long catalogue of the unlimited prerogatives of the kings of France (be they just or unjust) an article which he ever abandoned, limited, or even submitted to enquiry? He would have been still more illustrious, if, after having purchased and conquered his kingdom, he had done this, and if he had become the founder of a regular constitution.

Historical facts have not furnished me with the means of deciding in a proper manner if ever he found himself in a situation to acquire this glory, or if he then could have made any attempts of that kind with a greater degree of safety than has been done on a recent occasion. But it is very probable that he never had any of this kind. If you read the Memoirs of Sully with attention

tention (and I suppose that the opinions of the minister differed but little from those of his master) you will easily perceive that they were both royalists in all the extent of expression ; and with some few exceptions they constantly maintained that species of government.

As to the blood that Henry shed, he never spilt one drop more than was necessary for the maintenance of his *Right*; which he on no occasion would submit to any species of popular decision: he however could *kill* when it was necessary. How many bloody battles did he not fight against the majority of the French nation? How many cities did he not sack and pillage! Was his minister ashamed of sharing the booty that fell into his hands? It is true, that while closely besieging his own capital, he relieved and protected the unfortunate families who, at the peril of their lives, sallied forth to gather a scanty harvest under the walls of this very capital. I approve this conduct, but it does not inspire me with an enthusiastic admiration. He would have almost been a monster in cruelty, and
an

an idiot in politics, had he done otherwise. But while he was so compassionate to a few wretches dying of hunger, one cannot forget that it was he himself who famished them, by hundreds and by thousands, before he was in a situation to treat thus compassionately a few isolated individuals. It is true, indeed, that in starving Paris, he did nothing but what was conformable to the right of war: but that was a right which he enforced in all its plenitude. He followed the dictates of his heart and of his policy in the acts of compassion attributed to him: as to the famine which he occasioned, it was in consequence of the position of his army. But can you support the panegyrists of Henry IV. in regard to this very siege of Paris, when you recollect the late deplorable scarcity, and, above all, what has been done in consequence of that unhappy epoch? Of the occurrences that followed I shall not speak at present, although I think that *that* ought to be done, to inspire every honest heart with horror and indignation.

As

As to the " Scaffold," —it is impossible to decide at this moment, whether it would not have been more prudent for Henry IV. to have saved Marechal de Biron, instead of cutting off his head within the walls of the Bastile. He was under great obligations to this Marechal of France, as well as to his father; but Henry was less remarkable for his *gratitude* than for his *clemency*. As he never shed blood but for just reasons, I suppose that he thought himself obliged to do it then, on account of the good of his people, and the security of his throne. It must be allowed, however, that if he had pardoned this rash and impetuous man, he would never have been reproached with this act of commiseration.

If he imagined that the Marechal de Biron was capable of some of those scenes which we have lately seen exhibited in your kingdom; if he supposed that he might produce the same anarchy, the same confusion and the same distress, as the preliminaries to a humiliating and vexatious tyranny, which were on the point of beholding established

blished in France under the name of a Constitution,— it was right, very right, to cut, on its very formation, the first thread of so many treasons.

He would never have merited the crown that he acquired, and which he wore with so much glory, if interposing his compassion to defeat the preservative effects of a severe execution, he had scrupled to punish those traitors and enemies of their country and of the human race; — for, believe me, there can be no virtue where there is no wisdom.

Weakness only (that is to say, the parent and the ally of crimes) could have allowed itself to be affected by misdeeds which have a connection with power, and which aim at the usurpation of a certain degree of authority. To pardon such enemies, is to do the same thing as those who attempt the destruction of religion, of the laws, of policy, and of the prosperity of industry, of liberty, and of the prosperity of your country. If Henry IV. had such subjects as those who rule France at this very moment, he would do nothing more than his duty in punishing them.

The

The present Sovereign is in the situation of a victim, and not the avenger of rebellion. It is rather a misfortune than a crime, that he has not prevented this Revolution with that vigorous precaution, that activity, and that momentary decision which characterized Henry IV.

Louis XVI. according to what I hear and believe, has received from nature as perfect an understanding, and a heart as soft and humane, as his illustrious ancestor. These are indeed the *elements* of virtue; but he was born under the *canopy of a Throne*, and was not prepared by adversity for a situation, the trials of which the most perfect and the most absolute virtue could have scarce resisted.

As to the proceedings, the men, the means, the pretexts, the projects, the consequences arising from false plans and false calculations of every nature and of every species, which have reduced this Sovereign to appear in no better light than an instrument for the ruin of his country — these are circumstances

cumstances to be recorded and commented on by the Historian.

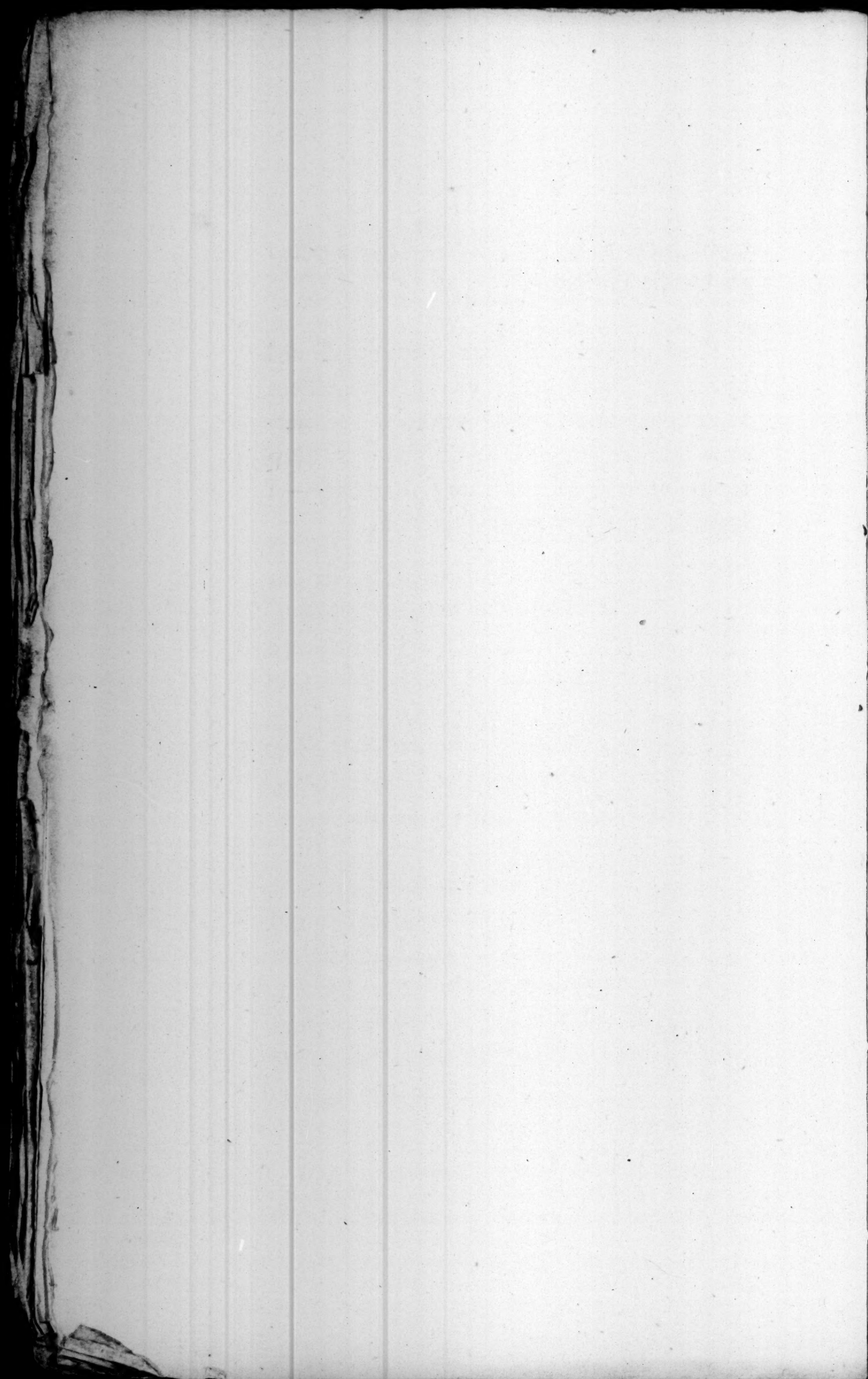
These remarks, Sir, have been occasioned by reading your Letter ; you may print them as an Appendix to your work, or in whatever manner you please ; or you may keep them for your own private satisfaction — I leave it intirely to your discretion.

I am, Sir,

Your very humble Servant,

E. BURKE.

Beaconsfield, Jan. 2, 1791.



LETTER

TO CAPTAIN W —.

(C O P Y.)

Duke Street, St. James's, Feb. 11, 1791

SIR,

I must beg your favourable Interpretation of my long Silence. I have really been engaged in Business which has occupied my whole Mind, and made me somewhat negligent in the Attentions which are most justly due from me. Amongst those I must reckon what I owe to you, for your Communication of the Sentiments of the Abbe Maury, and for the very polite and obliging Manner in which you have made that Communication.

I have to thank you for the excellent Speeches of the Abbe's, which, until your
Goodness

Goodness furnished me with them, I had never read. I had never before seen any Thing of his which could furnish a proper Idea of his Manner of healing a Subject. I had seen him only in detached Pieces, and sometimes, I apprehend, under the Disadvantage of a Representation of his Enemies. —Even in that Form I thought I perceived the Traces of a superior Mind.

The Pieces which you have been so kind as to put into my Hands, have more than justified the Ideas I had formed of him from Reputation. I find there a bold, manly, commanding, haughty, Tone of Eloquence; free and rapid, and full of Resources: but admiring, as I do, his Eloquence, I admire much more his unwearied Perseverance, his invincible Constancy, his firm Intrepidity, his undaunted Courage, and his noble Defiance of vulgar Opinion, and public Clamor. These are real Foundations of Glory. Whenever he shall get rid of the Dangers of his Inviolability, and shall wish to relax in the Ease and free Intercourse of this Land of Slavery (in
which

which he has nothing to dread from a Committee of Researches, or the excellent Laws of *lese Nation*) he shall, with a very sincere and open Heart, receive from me the *accolade Chevaleresque*, which he condescends to desire: for he has acquitted himself *en preux Chevalier*, and as a valiant Champion in the Cause of Honor, Virtue, and noble Sentiments; in the Cause of his King and his Country, in the Cause of Law, Religion, and Liberty. Be pleased only to express my Sorrow, that the Mediocrity of my Situation, and the very bad French which I speak, will, neither of them, suffer me to entertain him with the Distinction I should wish to shew him. I will do the best I can.

I have had the Count de Mirabeau in my House—will he submit afterwards to enter under the same Roof? I will have it purified and expiated, and I shall look into the best *Formulas*, from the Time of Homer downwards, for that Purpose; I will do every thing but irritate the Spaniard who burned his House, because the *Connetable*
de

de Bourbon had lodged in it. That Ceremony is too expensive for my Finances. Any Thing else I shall readily submit to, for its Purification; for I am *extremely superstitious*, and think his coming into it was of evil Augury; worse, a great deal, than the Crows which the Abbe will find continually flying about me. It is his having been in so many Prisons in France, that has proved so ominous to them all.

Let the Hall of the National Assembly talk to itself, and take Means of averting the same ill Auspices that threaten it. They are a fine Nation that send their Monarchs to Prison, and take their Successors from the Jails! The Birth of such Monsters has made me as superstitious as they. A Friend of mine just come from Paris, tells me, he was present when the Count de Mirabeau (I beg his Pardon) Mr. Ricquetti, thought proper to entertain the Assembly with his Opinion of me. I only answer him by referring him to the *World's* Opinion of *him*. I have the Happiness not to be disapproved by my Sovereign

reign. I can bear the Frowns of Ricquetti the First who is theirs. I am safe under the British Laws. — I do not intend to put myself in the Way of his Inquisition, or of his *lanterne*; which I consider as much more dangerous to honest Men, though not to him, than the Bastille was formerly.

If I were to go to France, I should think the Government of Louis XVI. much more favorable to Liberty than that of their present King, Ricquetti the First. In one Thing, indeed, I find him, though he was a bad Subject, to me at least, a kind Sovereign; since, in speaking of me, he has done it in the only Way which could contribute either to my Satisfaction or Reputation.

To be the Subject of Monsieur Ricquetti's Invectives, and of Abbe Maury's Approbation at the same Time, is an Honor to which little can be added. Mirabeau in his Jail would be an Object of my Pity; on his Throne (which by the Sport of Fortune

Fortune may be the Reward of what—commonly leads to what I don't chuse to name) he is the Object of my Disdain. For Vice is never so odious, and to rational Eyes, never so contemptible, as when it usurps and disgraces the natural Place of Virtue; and Virtue is never more amiable to all who have a true Taste for Beauty, than when she is naked and stripp'd of all the borrowed Ornaments of Fortune.

Mr. Cazales and Abbe Maury have derived Advantages to their Fame from their Disasters, which they never could have had from the most prosperous Event of their Conflicts; which, however, I wish may come in the End, not for their own Sakes, but for the Benefit of Mankind.

I have the Honor to be, &c.

[Signed]

Edmd. Burke.